

The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

Illustrated from Scenes in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Thanhouser Film Company

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CHAPTER X.

The Past a Blank.

It was perfectly true that Florence had cast herself into the sea. It had not been an act of despair, however. On the contrary, hope and courage had prompted her to leap. The night was clear, with only a moderate sea running. At the time the great ship was passing the banks, and almost within hail she saw a fishing schooner riding gracefully at anchor. She quite readily believed that if she remained on board the George Washington she was lost. She naturally forgot the marvel of wireless telegraphy. No longer may a man hide at sea.

So, with that quick thought which was a part of her inheritance, she seized the life buoy, climbed the rail and leaped far out. As the great, dark, tossing sea swooped up to meet her she noted a block of wood bobbing up and down. She tried to avoid it, but could not, and struck it head on. Despite the blow and the shock of the chill water she instinctively clung to the buoy. The wash from the mighty propellers tossed her about, hither and yon, from one swirl to another, like a chip of wood. Then everything grew blank.

Fortunately for her the master of the fishing schooner was at the time standing on his quarterdeck by the wheel, squinting through his glass at the liner and envying the ease and comfort of those on board her. The mate, sitting on the steps and smoking his turning-in pipe, saw the master lean forward suddenly, lower the glass, then raise it again.

"Lord a'mighty!"

"What's the matter, cap'n?"

"Jake, in God's name, come 'ere an' take a peek through this glass. I'm dreamin'!"

The mate jumped and took the glass. "Where away, sir?"

"A pint off th' starboard bow. See somethin' white bobbin' up?"

"Yessir! Looks like some one dropped a bolster 'r a pillar overboard. . . . Cod's whiskers!" he broke off.

"Then I ain't really seein' things," cried the master. "Hi, y' lubbers!" he yelled to the crew; "lower th' dory. They's a woman in th' water out there. I seen her leap th' rail. Look alive! Sharp's th' word! Mate, you go 'long."

The crew dropped their tasks and sprang for the davits, and the starboard dory was lowered in shipshape style.

It takes a good bit of seamanship to haul a body out of the sea, into a dancing bobtailed dory, when one moment it is climbing frantically heavenward and the next heading for the bottomless pit. They were very tender with her. They laid her out in the bottom of the boat, with the life buoy as a pillow, and pulled energetically for the schooner. She was alive, because she breathed; but she did not stir so much as an eyelid. It was a stiff bit of work, too, to land her aboard without adding to her injuries. The master ordered the men to put her in his own bunk, where he nearly strangled her by forcing raw brandy down her throat.

"Well, she's alive, anyhow."

When Florence finally opened her eyes the gray of dawn lay on the sea, dotted here and there by the schooners of the fleet, which seemed to be hanging in midair, as at the moment there was visible to the eye no horizon.

"Don't seem t' recognize nothin'."

"Mebbe she's got a fever," suggested the mate, rubbing his bristly chin.

"Fever nothin'! Not after bein' in th' water half an hour. Mebbe she hit one o' them wooden floats we left. Them dinged liners keep on crowdin' us," growled Barnes, with a fisherman's hate for the floating hotels. "Went by without a toot. See 'er, jes' like th' banker's wife goin' t' church on Sunday? A mile a minute; fog or no fog, it's all the same t' them. They run us down an' never stop. What th' tarnation we goin' to do? She'll haff t' stay aboard till th' run is over. I can't afford t' yank up my mudhook this time o' day."

"Guess she can stand three 'r four days in our company, smellin' oil-cloths, fish, kerosene, an' punk t'bacco."

"If y' don't like th' kind o' t'bacco I buy buy your own. I ain't objectin' none."

The mate stepped over to the bunk and gingerly ran his hand over the girl's head. "Cod's whiskers, cap'n, they's a bump as big's a cork on th' back o' her head! She's struck one o' them floats—all right. Where's th' arnica?"

Barnes turned to his locker and rummaged about, finally producing an ancient bottle and some passably clean cloth used frequently for bandages. Sometimes a man grew careless with his knife or got in the way of a pulley block. With blundering kindness the two men bound up the girl's head, and then went about their duties.

For three days Florence evinced not the slightest inclination to leave the

dunk. She lay on her back either asleep or with her eyes staring at the beams above her head. She ate just enough to keep her alive; and the strong black coffee did nothing more than to make her wakeful. No one knew what the matter was. There was the bump, now diminished; but that it should leave her in this comatose state vastly puzzled the men. The truth is she had suffered a slight concussion of the brain, and this, atop of all the worry she had had for the last few weeks, was sufficient to cause this blankness of the mind.

The final cod was cleaned and



"The Poor Young Thing," murmured Mrs. Barnes.

packed away in salt, the mudhook raised, and the schooner Betty set her sails for the southwest. Barnes realized that to save the girl she must have a doctor who knew his business. Mrs. Barnes would know how to care for the girl, once she knew what the trouble was. There would be some news in the papers. A young and beautiful woman did not jump from a big Atlantic liner without the newspapers getting hold of the facts.

A fair wind carried the Betty into her haven, and shortly after Florence was sleeping peacefully in a feather bed, ancient, it is true, but none the less soft and inviting. In all this time she had not spoken a single word.

"The poor young thing!" murmured the motherly Mrs. Barnes. "What beautiful hair! O, John, I wish you would give up the sea. I hate it. It is terrible. I am always watching you in my mind's eye, in calm weather, in storms. Pieces of wrecks come ashore, and I always wonder over the death and terror back of them."

"Don't y' worry none about me Betty. I never take no chances. Now I'm goin' int' th' village an' bring back th' sawbones. He'll tell us what t' do."

The village doctor shook his grizzled head gravely.

"She's been hurt and shocked at the same time. It will be many days before she comes around to herself. Just let her do as she pleases. Only keep an eye on her so that she doesn't wander off and get lost. I'll watch the newspapers and if I come across anything which bears upon the case I'll notify you."

But he searched the newspapers in vain, for the simple fact that he did not think to glance over the old ones.

The village took a good deal of interest in the affair. They gossiped about it and strolled out to the Barnes' cottage to satisfy their curiosity. One thing was certain to their simple minds: some day Barnes would get a great sum of money for his kindness. They had read about such things in the family story paper. She was a rich man's daughter; the ring on the unknown's finger would have fitted out a fleet.

Florence was soon able to walk about. Ordinary conversation she seemed to understand; but whenever the past was broached she would shake her head with frowning eyes. Her main diversion consisted of sitting on the sand dunes and gazing out at sea.

One day a stranger came to town. He said he represented a life insurance company and was up here from Boston to take a little vacation. He sat on the hotel porch that evening, surrounded by an admiring audience. The stranger had been all over the world, so it seemed. He spoke familiarly of St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, Shanghai, as the villagers—some of them—might have spoken of Boston. There were one or two old timers among the audience. They had been to all these parts. The stranger knew what he was telling about. After telling of his many voyages he asked if there was a good bathing beach nearby. He was told that he would find the most suitable spot near Captain Barnes' cottage just outside the village.

"An' say, Mister, seen anythin' in th' papers about a missin' young woman?" asked some one.

"Missing young woman? What's that?"

The man told the story of Florence's leap into the sea and her subsequent arrival at the cape.

"That's funny," said the stranger. "I don't recollect reading about any young woman being lost at sea. But those big liners are always keeping such things under cover. Hoodoos the ship, they say, and turns prospective passengers to other lines. It hurts business. What's the young girl look like?"

Florence was described minutely. The stranger teetered in his chair and smoked. Finally he spoke.

"She probably was insane. That's the way generally with insane people. They can't see water or look off a tall building without wanting to jump. My business is insurance, and we've got the thing figured pretty close to the ground. They used to get the best of us on the suicide game. A man would take out a large policy today and tomorrow he'd blow his head off, and we'd have to pay his wife. But nowadays a policy is not worth the paper it's written on if a man commits suicide under two years."

"You ain't tryin' to insure anybody in town, are you?"

"Oh, no. No work for me when I'm on my vacation. Well, I'm going to bed; and tomorrow morning I'll go out to Captain Barnes' beach and have a good swim. I'm no sailor, but I like water."

He honestly enjoyed swimming. Early the next morning he was in the water, frolicking about as playfully as a boy. He had all the time in the world. Over his shoulder he saw two women wandering down toward the beach. Deeper he went, farther out. He was a bold swimmer, but that did not prevent a sudden and violent attack of cramps. And it was a rare piece of irony that the poor girl should save the life of that scoundrel who was without pity or mercy. As she saw his face a startled frown marred her brow. But she could not figure out the puzzle. Had she ever seen the man before? She did not know, she could not tell. Why could not she remember? Why must her poor head ache so when she tried to pierce the wall of darkness which surrounded her mentally?

The man thanked her feebly, but not in his heart. When he had sufficiently recovered he returned to the village and sought the railway station, where the Western Union had its office.

"I want to send a code message to my firm. Do you think you can follow it?"

"I can try," said the operator.

The code was really Slav; and when the long message was signed it was signed by the name Vroon.

The day after the news came that Florence had jumped overboard off the banks, Vroon with a dozen other men had started out to comb all the fishing villages along the New England coast. Somewhere along the way he felt confident that he would learn whether the girl was dead or alive. If she was dead then the game was a draw, but if she was alive there was still a fighting chance for the Black Hundred. He had had some idea of remaining in the village and accomplishing the work himself; but after deliberation he concluded that it was important enough for Braine himself to



Braine Took Florence Aboard the Chartered Yacht.

take a hand in. So the following night he departed for Boston, from there to New York. He proceeded at once to the apartment of the princess, where Braine declared that he himself would go to the obscure village and claim Florence as his own child. But to insure absolute success they would charter Morse's yacht and steam right up into the primitive harbor.

When Vroon left the apartment Norton saw him. He was a man of impulses, and he had found by experience that first impulses are generally the best. He did not know who Vroon was. Any man who called on the Princess Perigoff while Braine was with her would be worth following.

On the other hand, Vroon recognized the reporter instantly and with that ever-ready and alert mind of his set about to lure the young man into a trap out of which he might not easily

come.

Norton decided to follow his man. He might be going on a wild-goose chase, he reasoned; still his first impulses had hitherto served him well. He looked careworn. He was convinced that Florence was dead, despite the assertions of Jones to the contrary. He had gone over all the mishaps which had taken place and he was now absolutely convinced that his willom friend Braine and the Princess Perigoff were directly concerned. Florence had either been going to or coming from the apartment. And that memorable day of the abduction the princess had been in the dry goods shop.

Vroon took a downtown surface car, and Norton took the same. He sat huddled in a corner, never suspecting that Vroon was watching him from a corner of his eye. Norton was not keen today. The thought of Florence kept running through his head.

The car stopped and Vroon got off. He led Norton a winding course which at length ended at the door of a tenement building. Vroon entered. Norton paused, wondering what next to do, now that his man had reached his destination. Well, since he had followed him all this distance he must make an effort to find out who he was and what he was going to do. Cautiously he entered the hallway. As he was about to lay his hand on the newel post of the dilapidated stairs the floor dropped from under his feet and he was precipitated into the cellar.

This tenement belonged to the Black Hundred; it concealed a thousand doors and a hundred traps. Its history was as dark as its hallways.

When Vroon and his companion, who had been waiting for him, descended into the cellar they found the reporter insensible. They bound, blindfolded, and gagged him quickly.

"Saunders," said Vroon, "you tell Corrigan that I've a sailor for him to-night, and that I want this sailor booked for somewhere south of the equator. Tell him to say to the master that this fellow is ugly and disobedient. A tramp freighter, whose captain is a bully. Do you understand me?"

"I get you. But there's no need to go to Corrigan this trip. Bannock is in port and sails tonight for Norway. That's far enough."

"Bannock? The very man. Well, Mr. Norton, reporter and amateur detective, I guess we've got you fast

enough this time. You may or may not come back alive. Go and bring around a taxi; some one you can trust. I'll dope the reporter while you're gone.

Long hours afterward Norton opened his aching eyes. He could hardly move and his head buzzed abominably. What had happened? What was the meaning of this slow rise and fall of his bed? Shangaialed?

"Come out o' that now, ye skulker!" roared a voice down the companionway.

"Shangaialed!" the reporter murmured. He sat up and ran through his pockets. Not a sou-ma-ree, not a match even; and a second glance told him that the clothes he wore were not his own. "They've landed me this time. Shangaialed! What the devil am I going to do?"

"Dye hear me?" bawled the strident voice again.

Norton looked about desperately for some weapon of defense. He saw an engineer's spanner on the floor by the bunk across the way, and with no small physical effort he succeeded in obtaining it. He stood up, his hand behind his back.

"All right, me bucko! I'll come down an' git ye!"

A pair of enormous boots began to appear down the companionway, and there gradually rose up from them a man as wide as a church door and as deep as a well.

"Wait a moment," said Norton, gripping the spanner. "Let us have a perfect understanding right off the bat."

"We're goin' t' have it, matey. Don't ye worry none."

Norton raised the spanner, and, dizzy as he was, faced this seafaring Hercules courageously.

"I've been shangaialed, and you know it. Where are we bound?"

"Copenhagen."

"Well, for a month or more you'll beat me up whenever the opportunity offers. But I merely wish to warn you that if you do you'll find a heap of trouble waiting for you the next time you drop your mudhook in North America."

"Is that so?" said the giant, eyeing the spanner and the shaking hand that held it aloft.

"It is. I'll take your orders and do the best I can, because you've got the upper hand. But, God is witness, you'll pay for every needless blow you strike. Now what do you want me to do?"

"Lay down that spanner an' come on deck, I'll tell ye what t' do. I was goin' t' whale th' daylight out o' ye; t' ye're somethin' av a man. Drop the spanner first."

Norton hesitated. As lithe as a tiger the bulk of a man sprang at him and crushed him to the floor, wrenching away the spanner. Then the giant took Norton by the scruff of his neck and banged him up the steps to the deck.

"I ain't goin' t' hurt ye. I hac t' show ye that no spanner ever bothered Mike Bannock. Now, d' know what a cook's galley is?"

"I do," said Norton, breathing hard.

"Well, hike there an' start in with peelin' spuds, an' don't waste 'em neither. That'll be all fer th' present. Ye were due for a wallop, but I kinda like yer spunk."

So Jim stumbled down to the cook's galley and grimly set to work at the

potatoes. It might have been far worse. But here he was, likely to be on the high seas for months, and no way of notifying Jones what had happened. The outlook was anything but cheerful. But a vague hope awoke in his heart. If they were still after him might it not signify that Florence lived?

Meantime Braine had not been idle. According to Vroon the girl's memory was in bad shape; so he had not the least doubt of bringing her back to New York without mishap. Once he had her there the game would begin in earnest. He played his cards exceedingly well. Steaming up into the little fishing harbor with a handsome yacht in itself would allay any distrust. And he wore a capital disguise, too. Everything went well till he laid his hand on Florence's shoulder. She gave a startled cry and ran over to Barnes, clinging to him wildly.

"No, no!" she cried.

"Now what, my child?" asked the sailor.

She shook her head. Her aversion was inexplicable.

"Come, my dear; can't you see that it is your father?" Braine turned to the captain. "She has been like this for a year. Heaven knows if she'll ever be in her right mind again," sadly. "I was giving her an ocean voyage, with the kindest nurses possible, and yet she jumped overboard. Come, Florence."

The girl wrapped her arms all the tighter around Barnes' neck.

An idea came into the old sailor's head. "Of course, sir, y've got proof that she's your daughter?"

"Proof?" Braine was taken aback. "Yes; somethin' t' prove that you're her father. I got skinned out of a sloop once because I took a man's word at its face value. Black an' white, an' on paper, says I, hereafter."

"But I never thought of such a thing," protested Braine, beginning to lose his patience. "I can't risk sending to New York for documents. She is my daughter, and you will find it will not pay to take this peculiar stand."

"In black an' white, 'r y' can't have her."

Braine thereupon rushed forward to seize Florence. Barnes swung Florence behind him.

"I guess she'll stay here a leetle longer, sir."

Time was vital, and this obstinacy made Braine furious. He reached again for Florence.

"Clear out o' here, 'r show your authority," growled Barnes.

"She goes with me, or you'll regret it."

"All right. But I guess th' law won't hurt me none. I'm in my rights. There's the door, mister."

"I refuse to go without her!"

Barnes sighed. He was on land a man of peace, but there was a limit to his patience. He seized Braine by the shoulders and hustled him out of the house.

"Bring your proofs, mister, an' nothin' more'll be said; but till y' bring 'em, keep away from this cottage."

And, simple-minded sailor that he was, he thought this settled the matter.

That night he kept his ears open for unusual sounds, but he merely wasted his night's rest. Quite naturally, he reckoned that the stranger would make his attempt at night. Indeed, he made it in broad daylight, with Barnes not a hundred yards away, calking a dory whose seams had sprung aleak. Braine had Florence upon the chartered yacht before the old man realized what had happened. He never saw Florence again; but one day, months later, he read all about her in a newspaper.

Florence fought; but she was weak, and so the conquest was easy. Braine was kind enough, now that he had her safe. He talked to her, but she merely stared at the receding coast.

"All right; don't talk if you don't want to. Here, to one of the men, 'take her to the cabin and keep her there. But don't you touch her. I'll break you if you do. Put her in the cabin and guard the door; at least keep an eye on it. She may take it into her head to jump overboard."

Even the temporarily demented are not without a species of cunning. Florence had never seen Braine till he appeared at the Barnes cottage. Yet she revolted at the touch of his hand. On the second day out toward New York she found a box of matches and blithely set fire to her cabin, walked out into the corridor and thence to the deck. When the fire was discovered it had gained too much headway to be stopped. The yacht was doomed. They put off in the boats and for half a day drifted helplessly.

Fate has everything mapped out like a game of chess. You move a pawn, and bang goes your bishop, or your knight, or your king; or she lets you almost win a game, and then checkmates you. But there is one thing to be said in her favor—all at her how we will, she is always giving odds to the innocent.

Mike Bannock was in the pilothouse, looking over his charts, when the look-out in the crow's nest sang out: "Two boats adrift off the port bow, sir!" And Bannock, who was a first-class sailor, although a rough one, shouted down the tube to the engine room. The freighter came to a halt in about ten minutes. The castaways saw that they had been noted, and pulled gallantly at the oars.

There are some things which science, well advanced as it is, cannot explain. Among them is the shock which cuts off the past and the counter-shock which reawakens memory. They may write treatise after treatise



"Girl, I Love You Better Than Life."

in truly getting beyond that dark wall of mystery.

At the sound of Jim Norton's voice and at the sight of his face—for subconsciously she must have been thinking of him all the while—a great blinding heat-wave seemed to burn across her eyes, and when the effect passed away she was herself again. A wild glance at her surroundings convinced her that both she and her lover were in danger.

"Keep back," whispered Jim. "Don't recognize me."

"They believe that I've lost my mind, and I'll keep that idea in their heads. Sometime tonight I'll find a chance to talk to you."

It took a good deal of cautious maneuvering to bring about the meeting. "They shanghaied me. And I thought you dead! It was all wrong. It was a trick of that Perigoff woman, and it succeeded. Girl, girl, I love you better than life!"

"I know it now," she said, and she kissed him. "Has my father appeared yet?"

"No."

"Do you know anything at all about him?" sadly.

"I thought I did. It's all a jumble to me. But beware of the man who brought you here. He is the head of all our troubles; and if he knew I was on board he'd kill me out of hand. He'd have to."

Braine offered Bannock \$1,000 to turn back as far as Boston; and as Bannock had all the time in the world, carrying no perishable goods, he consented. But he never could quite understand what followed. He had put Florence and Braine in the boat and landed them; but when he went down to see if Braine had left anything behind, he found that individual bound and gagged in his bunk.

(To be continued)

Teachers' Examination.

The Highland county Board of School Examiners hereby gives notice that examinations of Applicants for County Teachers' Certificates will take place in the Washington School Building, Hillsboro, on the first Saturday of September, October, January, March, April, May and the last Friday of June and August.

As prescribed by law, the fee for these examinations will be 50 cents.

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